

The Council Chamber
The Dark Ascent
Arx System
40 ABY

Idris nodded to the command their lord had just issued, leaving the room shortly thereafter to execute Darth Nehelam's wishes and alert the Clans of the Brotherhood. The body of the captured prisoner still lay limp and motionless on the floor, while the councillors murmured amongst themselves at this new information. Zxyl Bes'uliik pushed himself to his feet with both hands on the marvelous table in front of him, chair sliding backwards behind his legs. The other Dark Council members turned to look at him, and the half-breed could feel the icy stare of the Grand Master on the side of his face.

"Where are you going?" queried the Dark Lord.

The helmeted head of the Mandalorian craned towards the head of the table to address the Grand Master directly and respectfully, "Hunting, my Lord. I'm hardly about to let Adenn have all the fun. He may have the Inquisitorius at his disposal, but I have A.C.E.'s own galactic network of contacts to squeeze... and squeeze I shall."

There was a hint of excitement in the Regent's voice.

Evant closed his eyes for a moment, before opening them in his deputy's direction and seeking silent counsel from the Prophet at his side. Victae gave the slightest nod in response. Better to explore all avenues to uncover as much as possible about these Children of Mortis than let resources and contacts that could unveil new information go untapped. The Grand Master returned his gaze back to the Taldrya on his feet, giving his own nod of approval.

With a nod of acknowledgement and quick bow, the half-breed departed the table and soon after the chamber, tapping away on his left vambrace.

"Prepare the **Zuguruk** for departure."

Regent's Office
Kalevalan Star Yacht *Zuguruk*
Above Sluis Van

A bronze, armored carrying an ancient Mandalorian axe exited the main lift of the Regent's yacht and into the expansive executive office at the vessel's apex. The office was decorated lavishly, even for a scoundrel and Mandalorian such as Zxyl Bes'uliik. A large obsidian desk with nothing but a small holoprojector in one corner and portable terminal in the center of the desk surrounded by three chairs sat at the wall dividing the office from Zxyl's luxury

quarters, his warbanner hanging proudly behind it. Displays of Mandalorian weapons and artifacts befitting of the Taldrya's heritage surrounded the outer edges of the room, with gaps in the displays filled by holoprojections of Arx Capital Exchange's biggest achievements.

As the Mandalorian Ormr Barbaros approached the obsidian slab at which the Regent sat, a small wave of uneasiness washed over him. The news he had brought was less than ideal, and sure to make his comrade's temper flare. Still, he needed to take the leap - and did.

"Zxyl..." started the Feeorin from behind his tusked helmet, pausing until his fellow Mandalorian's attention shifted up from the portable terminal on his desk, "Our investigation has concluded. It seems as though Adenn was correct; the Children of Mortis have widespread influence across all reaches of the galaxy."

"Sithspit," came Bes'uliik's initial reply as his left hand curled into a fist. Barbaros nodded, before continuing to deliver the *worse* news.

"That's not all. It appears as though some of our biggest suppliers and partners have been compromised. The list is large, but includes the likes of Sienar-Jaemus, Sonn-Blass, even Synergy."

The Regent slammed his fist into the hardened crystalline surface of his desk with a loud *bang* at the mention of Synergy as his anger rose. How could Synergy Technologies, a company created by the Dark Council just last year to manufacture designs for the Brotherhood have been infiltrated so soon? While the infiltration of Sonn-Blass and Sienar-Jaemus were less than ideal, the news of Synergy was especially disturbing to the Dathomirian Zabrak-Human hybrid given the company's close proximity to the Brotherhood even as an independent organization, and his own plans to widely expand Synergy's operations and manufacturing output with the help of Arx Capital Exchange. They would need to investigate further, and eliminate the rot before further damage could be done.

"Who at Synergy is compromised?" Zxyl asked, annoyance ever-present in his question.

Jalzia Nostrim, the Chairwoman of Mining at Synergy and the Zabraki female currently responsible for overseeing weapons manufacturing entered the Regent's Office with a small escort of two lightly armed SynTech security officers, each with a WLD-5 Peacekeeper holstered to their sides.

Fitting, carrying Synergy weapons...

Fervently awaiting their arrival, the Reaver wasted no time and stepped forth from his desk - extending an armored hand towards her. Nostrim reached out with the opposing hand, taking the Mandalorian's in hers and shaking it firmly. After the release, Bes'uliik motioned to the

desk behind them and took his own seat. His fellow Zabrak approached and followed suit a moment later, her two guards gazing at the artifacts surrounding the room as they stood roughly a meter behind her. Both of the Taldrya's hands rested on the desk in front of him, fingers interlocked.

"My Lord, I was surprised to hear from you. We almost never have direct contact with a member of your organization, let alone one with such stature as yourself," she remarked.

"Indeed Jalzia. I can call you Jalzia, can I not?" Zxyl questioned, establishing what type of decorum she expected from this meeting. No matter the response, he would get what he needed.

"Chairwoman Nostrim, please," she raised a hand, eyes narrowing slightly. A smile crept across the Mandalorian's hidden lips. He had struck a nerve.

"Okay, *Chairwoman*... I'll cut straight to the chase. I assume this meeting has been kept secret?"

She nodded in acknowledgement.

Good," he continued, "What do you know of an organization calling itself the *Children of Mortis*?"

The Synergy executive shifted uncomfortably in her seat for a moment, face remaining absolute as she continued to look into the visor of the Mandalorian. Her guards returned their attention directly to the Regent as she shifted. Then she took the opportunity to lie.

"I've never heard of them."

Zxyl grunted lightly. He *knew* she had lied based on the reconnaissance completed by his most trusted operative. His armored hands released, with the index finger on his left hand and tapping a key on the portable terminal he had pushed off to the side prior to the meeting. The two sat in silence for only a few moments before the lift doors slid open, revealing of short stature a muscular Noghri clad in a lightweight armor. On his back was a midnight black 773 Firepuncher Sniper Rifle slung across diagonally.

Jalzia shifted in the seat so that she could view the newcomer, puzzled at his arrival. The two SynTech guards turned to face the dark-skinned Noghri, hands resting on the grips of their holstered pistols.

"Who is this? I thought this was a *private* meeting?"

"It is," noted Bes'uliik as he motioned to the short man at the other end of the room, "This is one of my most trusted associates, Zex. He conducts, well, *sensitive* operations and

investigations on my behalf. It was he who discovered you had off-the-books meetings with a member of their organization, going back months ago, that matches a description provided by our intelligence community.

It was at this point that the Mandalorian rose to his feet, standing over the Synergy executive in an aggressive fashion. Zex understood the cue, swiftly swinging his rifle around from behind and leveling it at the two guards in the blink of an eye. The one standing to Nostrim's left had barely been able to get his Peacekeeper from the holster before a crimson bolt from the 773 Firepuncher shredded his chest and dropped him. The guard standing to her right had managed to get his pistol raised, but was still too slow to pull the trigger before a similar bolt from the Noghri dropped him to the floor as well.

Jalzia shrieked, racing to her feet as unfettered panic set in. Her chest heaved as she began to hyperventilate, her only exit blocked by the Infiltrator that had eliminated her escort in a flash. "What do you want from me?!" She exclaimed, taking a step back from her chair towards the side of the room. Zex did not move from his position, shifting his rifle to a low-ready position on his chest as he stood guard at the lift.

"**The truth!**" bellowed the Mercenary Regent as he stepped out from behind the desk, attention never leaving the Zabradi female.

"Alright, fine!" she shrieked with panic again, pulling a datapad from her robes and tossing it onto the obsidian slab. "I was approached several months ago by a mysterious person, whose name I was never told. They promised me the Chief Executive position at Synergy and all the power or credits I could ever desire if I fed them information on shipments and designs, made modifications they requested, and agreed to manufacture Arx Capital Exchange's designs for them."

Zxyl's eyes went wide behind his helmet, as his mind raced to consider the possibilities "What kind of modifications?"

"A kill chip," she said somberly, realizing she had sealed her fate. "Provided by their organization. We did an analysis. Designed to look like any other piece of circuitry, it's small yet can deliver enough of a charge to disable anything from a pistol to a turbolaser. We've been fitting them inside shipments sent to Arx for months."

This could be disastrous.

"So you have effectively been setting up Arx for a wide-scale disarmament? How is the kill chip activated?" Zxyl reached for the datapad, activating it and reviewing its contents. He found the answer to his question before Nostrim could answer.

The CM-101 Kill Chip. Activated via a central transponder, designed to accept a transmission from a single frequency within the same Star System. Just as Jalzia had said, it

had enough power to fry almost anything it was fitted to, and was created to look like any other piece of circuitry. Nobody would know it was ever fitted. Contained in the datapad was everything she had managed to research on the Children of Mortis. A group of fanatics - a cult - their objective was unknown, but it was clear from their intentions and actions with Synergy they were no ally. And it appeared as though they had a base of operations on Nar Shaddaa.

"Synergy thanks you for your service, Chairwoman.. but your services are no longer required."

"What! No!" she cried, as the Mandalorian raised his right hand from the datapad and sent a crimson bolt from the vambrace on his forearm into her chest. She stumbled momentarily, before collapsing into the floor. Zex remained motionless as Zxyl turned to face him.

"Alert Ormr. Tell him to have the crew bring us to Nar Shaddaa."

Lower Airlock
Kalevalan Star Yacht *Zuguruk*
Nar Shaddaa

The two Mandalorians checked over their equipment, making sure everything was secured in its place as the airlock opened and a flood of air blasted into the airlock. Unphased, the two shared a quick glance and nod before leaping from the base of the yacht and into the dark skies above the bustling Nar Shaddaa cityscape. The atmosphere outside the craft rushed and streaked past their armored forms as they plunged towards the surface of the planet, helmet HUDs guiding the way to their marked target.

Far below them, the Noghri assassin Zex was mounted on the roof of a building near their target, head cocked forward in the scope of his modified 773 Firepuncher. He was their watchful eyes above, and their outside backup should things go awry inside the compound and a quick-paced retreat be necessary. He established a total of three hostile guards situated on the roof, while several more guarded the main doors down below.

As the men plummeted, they began to make out individual shapes and even the small forms of people walking along the surface of the planet. Still nearly a kilometer up, they remained steadfast in their goal. Their hearts pounded in their chest with the rush the aerial drop provided. Mere moments later, they approached several hundred meters from the ground and opened their arms, going from a steep plunge to parallel with the ground below, finishing with their feet first as they fired the jetpacks on their backs. Plumes of smoke erupted from Ormr's Mitrinomon Z-6 Jetpack as it fired with everything it had to slow his descent, with Zxyl's more advanced Super Commando Jetpack firing in tandem with less of a smoke show to those below.

Their rate of descent declined exponentially, but the flare of Ormr's jetpack had caught the eye of one of the guards. With Zex watching for his reaction, he alerted the other two guards and aimed his own rifle - which appeared to be a Synergy S-5 Oathbreaker - into the air preparing to fire on the approaching figures. Thumbing the trigger, the Noghri let out a grin of his viscous teeth as he planted a bolt firmly into the guard's head. Alerted that they were under attack, one of the others went for his comlink. He was dispatched by the assassin with a bolt to the chest.

With the Mandalorians less than twenty five meters above him, the final guard had been able to raise his rifle in their direction and began letting loose unsilenced shots that buzzed through the air. The first few missed as the men did their best to maneuver around them, but one had managed to snag a direct hit on Zxyl's jetpack as a bolt from Ormr's vambrace connected and rendered him limp.

Bes'uliik dropped like a rock the final eight meters as the jetpack on his back cut-out, landing on the roof of the compound with a heavy *thud*, tucking and rolling as he did so to try and mitigate the force of the drop. Still, he did not come out unscathed, a searing pain forming in his right knee.

"Agh!" he exclaimed as he rose back to his feet, clutching his knee. Ormr landed with a lighter *thud* a moment later as he cut the propulsion on his own jetpack, tusked helmet craning over to face his comrade. He needn't say anything, for Zxyl answered his question immediately, "I'm fine. Just landed weird... it'll be okay."

Zxyl wrenched his lower leg to the side, cracking the knee. A slight relief from the pain washed over it as the pressure that had been growing relaxed. Returning to full height, he gave his fellow Mandalorian a quick nod. As if on cue, Barbaros pulled a thermal detonator from his belt and set it to a three second activation before pulling his arm back and launching it towards the roof access door. It careened forward, exploding in a brilliant ball of fire just before it would have made contact with the door. The obstacle and part of the surrounding walls were instantly vaporized, with several more meters of the surrounding area visibility damaged in the blast.

Klaxons began blaring across the compound Zex's own cue to begin his distraction. Lowering his face back to the modified Firepuncher's J-19 electroscope, the Noghri honed in on the guards at the front of the compound and began firing off the occasional shot from the silenced rifle, taking purposeful aim not to immediately maim all of them. That would be a poor distraction, and give away his position.

Proceeding forward - albeit slightly slower, in Zxyl's case - the two Mandalorians each readied their weapons as they entered into the top level of the compound through the newfound hole in the roof. Bes'uliik groaned lightly as he landed, but immediately raised his WESTAR-35 in front of him. Barbatos' hulking form followed suit, his Mandalorian Executioner Vibro-Ax held in a low-ready position as they began moving through the facility. A low-light red lighting greeted them, likely emergency lighting when the alarm was triggered.

The first hallway lacked any sort of resistance or exit, the two shuffling closer to the wall as their helmet auditory systems began picking up the echos of footfalls. They approached the corner to the corridor leading further into the compound more slowly, the sound of boots on the floor getting louder. Zxyl peered around the corner to the next hallway and quickly ducked his head back, holding his pistol high and raising four fingers for Ormr to see.

With the footfalls in the adjacent corridor mere seconds away Bes'uliik crouched and readied his pistol at the corner, waiting for the first target to pass through as the larger Mandalorian readied his axe to cut down the second. As the four men came into view hell was unleashed, the first going down with a bolt to the head and the second a mighty swing of the vibro-ax to the chest. As both crumbled their comrades turned to face the two assailants, but were quickly overpowered and dispatched accordingly.

The two mercenaries made their way through the rest of the facility mostly unscathed, doing away with what little resistance they encountered while most of the compound's security force was busy looking for their Noghri operative. They came upon a central server terminal, Ormr downloading whatever files they could access to an encrypted datacard while Zxyl did a quick repair on his jetpack to return it to working order; the slug had become lodged in some of the internal circuitry of his jetpack, shorting it. With the information they came for secured and accounted for, the Mandalorians made their way towards the exit

Barbatos pressed a button on this vambrace, opening a communications channel with Zex. They had gone radio silent until the objective had been reached to avoid interception of their communications.

“Zex, come in. Ready to make our exit.”

Two taps on a comlink were returned, confirming he was prepared to take out the resistance at the front of the compound when they exited. Once they had reached the main entrance of the compound and dispatched the two guards that had remained inside to secure it should someone breach the main doors - ironic, if nothing else - Zxyl prepared to activate the keypad on the side and open the blast doors when something caught his attention from behind. Out of nowhere, a black and white blade of contained plasma struck the wall beside the panel, nearly dismembering him and sending sparks flying.

Bes'uliik used his legs to force himself backwards and around, unsecuring his spear from between his jetpack and backplate as he brought it up to defend against another strike that collided a split second later. A figure in dark blue robes - presumably one of the Children of Mortis - beared down on him, pressing hard against the shaft of the spear and forcing the Mandalorian into the wall.

“Zxyl!” called Barbatos, heaving the two-handed axe above his head as he brought it down on the cloaked assailant. His blow never had the chance to connect as the man raised a hand in his direction, the Force flowing freely through his body and sending a wave of telekinetic energy pounding into him. The Feeorin crashed into the wall with a concussive *bang*, helmet smashing against the metallic wall. He crumbled to his buttocks, struggling to retain his composure and with it, consciousness.

“Sithspit!” roared the Regent as he pushed his arms forward with all his might in one fell motion, pushing the Force-user backwards a couple steps. Quickly spinning the bladed end of the spear forward, the half-breed gripped it hard at his side as he delivered several quick lunges at his target. The first few were avoided, but after one managed to catch his cloak the Child of Mortis swung the blade of his weapon to knock away the final blow. He again brought his lightsaber to bear on Zxyl, who had swiveled his body to the right to get out from between the man and the wall.

The conflict continued for only a minute as the two continued trading blows, neither really getting the upper hand. The Child of Mortis had managed to slip past the Mandalorian’s defenses once, but the blade of his weapon was deflected by the pure beskar alloy of his shoulder pauldron by pure chance. By now, Ormr had managed to regain his bearings and pushed himself to his feet, targeting the robed figure with his heads up display and raising his large right filigree-patterned vambrace. Almost a dozen pings went off inside the tusked helmet before the same amount of beskar-lined whistling birds erupted from the wrist weapon and collided with the back of the assailant, sending him careening and screaming in agony as they exploded in his spine.

With the target nearing collapse, Bes’uliik seized the opportunity that had presented itself and used his beskar spear to disarm his opponent, whisking the lightsaber free from his grip and off to the other side of the room as he spun the shaft and lunged the bladed end forward into the man’s abdomen. Collapsing to his knees, the man snarled in pain before he went limp on the floor. After checking for signs of life, Barbatos grabbed the man by his collar and dragged him over his shoulder.

Once the blast doors had been opened via the keypad, the Feeorin let loose a cyroban grenade into the distracted group of dissidents outside the compound’s entrance and froze their legs in place. Unable to move or take additional cover, a blaster bolt for each was launched from Zex’s 773 Firepuncher and rendered the area free of hostile forces. The Noghri continued to watch for additional reinforcements as the two Mandalorians activated their jetpacks, taking off into the night and returning to the **Zuguruk**, which had remained in a holding pattern above the cityscape until given the signal to pick up them - and of course, the Noghri.

While they were unsure of just how much information they had managed to secure, they now had another prisoner and more data than previously on the mysterious Children of Mortis. Now, the only immediate problem that remained for the Regent was to track down which

shipments of equipment sent to Brotherhood space had been fitted with the CM-101 kill chip before conflict between the two groups broke out.